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PM-COUP-DACKO

BY LOIC EVEN

BANGUI, SEPT 22, REUTER - DAVID DACKO, WHO SEIZED POWER FROM THE SELF-PROCLAIMED EMPEROR BOKASSA IN THE CENTRAL AFRICAN EMPIRE, SAID TODAY HE HAD PLANNED THE COUP WITH FRANCE AND FRIENDLY AFRICAN NATIONS OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS.

MR DACKO, NOW PRESIDENT OF THE RESTORED CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC, TOLD REPORTERS IN THIS CAPITAL CITY THAT THE PLANNING WITH FRANCE AND THE AFRICAN STATES WAS A WELL-KEPT SECRET.

''NONE OF THOSE AFRICAN LEADERS WHO KNEW WHAT WAS AFOOT SAID ANYTHING,'' PRESIDENT DACKO SAID.

''I RETURNED TO BANGUI FROM LIBREVILLE (CAPITAL OF GABON) ON THURSDAY EVENING TO MAKE THE PROCLAMATION OF THE ABOLITION OF THE EMPIRE AND THE RESTORATION OF THE REPUBLIC.

''WITHIN HOURS IT WAS ALL OVER.''

FRENCH TROOPS WERE FLOWN TO BANGUI AFTER PRESIDENT DACKO CALLED FOR THEM IN HIS FIRST SPEECH FOLLOWING THE COUP.

''WE WERE COUNTING FIRST AND FOREMOST ON OUR GOOD FRENCH FRIENDS,'' THE PRESIDENT SA.D TODAY.

''OUR FIRST PRIORITY IS TO RESTORE DEMOCRA.Y, TO LET THE PEOPLE, SO LONG OPPRESSED, LIVE THEIR LIVES FREELY. THIS WE WILL DO.''

ROPE 0938

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
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PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

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PM-COUP-DACKO 2 BANGUI

THE MEN OF BOKASSA'S HEAVILY-ARMED IMPERIAL GUARD DECLARED THEIR LOYALTY TO THE NEW PRESIDENT ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE COUP WAS ANNOUNCED.

THE REGULAR ARMY HAD BEEN VIRTUALLY WITHOUT WEAPONS OR AMMUNITION.

RESIDENTS OF BANGUI SEEMED TO REGARD THE NEWLY ARRIVED FRENCH SOLDIERS AS LIBERATORS, EXPRESSING RELIEF THAT THEY HAD COME.

SEATED IN THE ELEGANT PRESIDENTIAL PALAIS DE LA RENAISSANCE, MR DACKO SAID HE HAD FREED ALL POLITICAL PRISONERS STILL HELD IN BANGUI'S NOTORIOUS NGARAGBA PRISON AFTER ALMOST 14 YEARS OF THE BOKASSA DICTATORSHIP.

''THERE WERE ONLY 20 LEFT, WHOM I FREED,'' HE SAID.